

innuendos are stubborn things.

benzene #43

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special pete domenici issue

early last month i was at a small gathering with a few of my liberal friends, one of whom was chagrinedly recounting how as a young schoolboy he had supported nixon in 1968. "i thought he was really cool because he had an 'x' in his name." my first thought was to say, "you must like dan quayle then," not suspecting he'd make it to the vp nomination or even to the short list, but recognizing him as a potential young up-and-coming, rather like bill bradley or dick gephardt eight years ago or tim wirth or connie mack today. unfortunately, i concluded that such name-dropping would be unnecessarily arrogant, so i held my tongue. too bad.

this is benzene, an approximately monthly ~~pub~~zene published by ignatz jerome "mark" lew, who resides at 438 vernon #103, oakland, ca 94610, and can be phoned at (415) 268-8626. sub rates are 60¢ per issue.

i've recently received two unsolicited subscriptions from people i've never heard of, and i find that more gratifying than finishing sixth in the runestone poll, though the latter was a pleasant surprise as well -- a surprise because i thought that many of my fans (including my biggest fan, me) had declined to vote in the poll this year.

MARK LEW DEFT.

mr domenici is the senior senator from new mexico and the penultimate republican veep du jour -- taking his turn just after alan simpson and just before dan quayle. last winter i clipped a photo of him from a newspaper and stuck it on the wall in my living room. when visitors ask, "who's that?" i tell them that he, more than any other individual, deserves credit for saving the u.s. government from fiscal disaster in the 80s. i still believe that. i began developing republican sympathies in 1982-85 when the reagan administration and the democratic house leadership were engaging in irresponsible budget brinksmanship, and the republican senate, i though, was the only part of government behaving respectably. one senator who was particularly willing to forgo grandstanding and to take responsibility for tough decisions was budget committee chairman domenici. if only the rest of the party were more like him and less like ronald reagan, i might start calling myself a republican.

as the convention got going and more and more of the usual suspects were ruled out, political mentioners had to look farther afield to fill out their running-mate lists. even the name of bz's favorite, bob martinez, finally made it onto a few lists, in the you-don't-suppose-he'd-actually-choose-him category. my own estimation of martinez's chances began to rise a little when domenici was the hot speculation. if the party wants to contest sunbelt ethnics and is willing to consider a taxer, why wouldn't they take the more vigorous guy from the big state? by tuesday, i had pushed martinez up to 4%, into a three-way tie for eighth along with SC gov carroll campbell and sen quayle (and behind kemp, dole, lamar alexander, domenici, MS rep trent lott, CO sen bill armstrong, and pete dupont). four percent seems high for such dark horses only until you try to make your percentages add up to 100. my first attempt only came to 65.

i didn't get into list-making in earnest until the last day. tuesday morning at work i was looking at the list in the chronicle, loudly ridiculing ti generally for its shallowness and especially for putting quayle on the "short list" with kemp and dole. my republican co-worker, who had seen quayle on television the night before and liked him a bit, asked, "so who would you put on the list?" -- fortunately i didn't have too much work to do that morning. a few hours later (at about 3:15 central time) he came back saying, "you know, i really do think it's going to be quayle." sensing naivete but not recognizing it as my own, i offered to bet him two-to-one that it wouldn't be. the next morning, he was too much of a gentleman to accept my money, but not too much to laugh at my gullibility for the rest of the week.

thus, my initial reaction to the quayle selection was, "that sneaky son of a bitch, he knew," rather than the surprise it might otherwise have been. my early

appraisal of the choice was not nearly as negative as that of the gossips on the pbs talking heads shows. like roger ailes, i attach a lot of significance to the image game, and i thought it likely that quayle's advantageous image potential would offset the inevitable early objections. in retrospect, it's pretty clear that that won't be the case. crucial to the success of the maneuver was good spin control in the first few days, and the bush campaign, and especially sen quayle himself, bungled it.

the allegations of quayle's obscurity and inexperience lead me to believe that bob martinez would have likely had to face the same accusations. apparently the press and the public are in no mood for a new face. my favorite hindsight candidate is WY rep dick cheney. in retrospect he seems perfect in every way. his stature is impeccable even as his calm, low-key image is unlikely to upstage bush. he votes like a right-winger (ada rating of zero) but looks like a moderate (managerial, chief of staff under ford). most important, the press likes him.

it is interesting, though certainly not unprecedented, that quayle's main image problems are undeserved. he is being seen as a rich boy, but for a politician, he's unexceptional. among members of the senate, rockefeller, kennedy, heinz and danforth are obviously richer, and i think it's safe to assume that warner, metzenbaum, lautenberg and bingaman are too. besides those, there are about ten more senators, including lloyd bentsen, who are either richer than quayle or not too far behind.

i sense from the discussions of the candidates' wealth that the voters are trying to compare them with ordinary people. to do so is silly, because ordinary people don't make it to political prominence. when people of middle-class or poor background make it in politics, they generally do it by becoming rich first. even jesse jackson is a millionaire. implicit in the criticism of quayle as too rich is the idea that if a person is rich, he won't help the poor. perhaps that is true in quayle's case, but anyone who says so should be prepared to explain how quayle is different from roosevelt or kennedy.

the most enlightening aspect of the whole how-rich-is-he flap is that it shows (yet again) the public's naivete. presidential candidates are people who have a history of success, and successful people tend to make a lot of money. there's nothing shocking about that. to portray dukakis as the un-rich candidate is dishonest. dukakis's father came to america from greece and made a fortune (enough to give 18-year-old michael a \$1 million trust fund). that bush's father came from ohio and made a bigger fortune doesn't make the dukakis poor. if dukakis has \$20 million and quayle has \$30 million and bentsen has \$40 million and bush has \$50 million, they're all rich. to argue about who is more rich is not very meaningful.

most of the other criticisms of quayle are also undeserved. the "heartbeat question," the idea that he's not qualified to be president, is baloney. people like to pretend that there are only a handful of persons qualified to be president. my guess is that there are a few hundred, including about 50 politically active republicans. dan quayle may not be the most obvious, but (like most senators) he is one of them. the presidency is special, but it's not that special. if ronald reagan is qualified to be president, anybody is.

gossips have been asking what it tells us about george bush that he would go so far afield in his vp choice, and have frequently reached the startling conclusion that he did it partly for personal reasons. it is generally accepted that bush passed over dole and kemp because he doesn't get along with either of them. so what? personal compatibility is recognized as an important criterion for choosing cabinet members; why shouldn't it be for choosing vice-presidents? the idea that by picking quayle bush passed up a host of better candidates is another flimsy argument that hasn't even the appearance of plausibility except in retrospect. besides dole and kemp, there wasn't a single mentionee who wasn't criticized for being too liberal, too conservative, too rich, too uncharismatic, too young, too obscure, or some combination thereof.

the quayle-is-obscure story demonstrates the lack of objectivity among the washington press corps. 99% of the voters had never heard of tom kean, pete domenici, alan simpson, jim thompson, or lamar alexander either, unless they happened to live

in his home state. to the general public, all the potential running-mates are equally unknown. to them, the political observers' comparisons of obscurity are meaningless.

to us political junkies, however, they're not meaningless. the only thing i recall having read about quayle before last month is his bio in the almanac of american politics (a favorable review which belies the current perception of him as a senate underachiever), and i remember wondering at the time why i hadn't ever read about him in the news. there are certain public figures whom the press likes to cover and others whom they don't. dan quayle is one of the latter, and i think some journalists are embarrassed that a guy they've been ignoring is now a candidate. last year when sam nunn, one of their favorites, made it clear that he wouldn't be a candidate, they justified their months of touting him by calling it a "surprise announcement." similarly, now that one of their unfavorites is going to be a candidate, they're justifying their lack of touting by calling him a "lightweight."

some of the most vigorous quayle bashing has been in the new republic, but owing to their endorsement of al gore earlier this year, they had to forgo the popular criticism that quayle is too young and inexperienced. the constitution requires that a president be at least 35 years old, and that is sufficient. franklin roosevelt was 39 when he ran as cox's running-mate in 1924. his cousin and uncle-in-law theodore was 41 when he became vice-president, as will be quayle if he does the same. it is true that we don't want a kid for president, but a 41-year-old is not a kid.

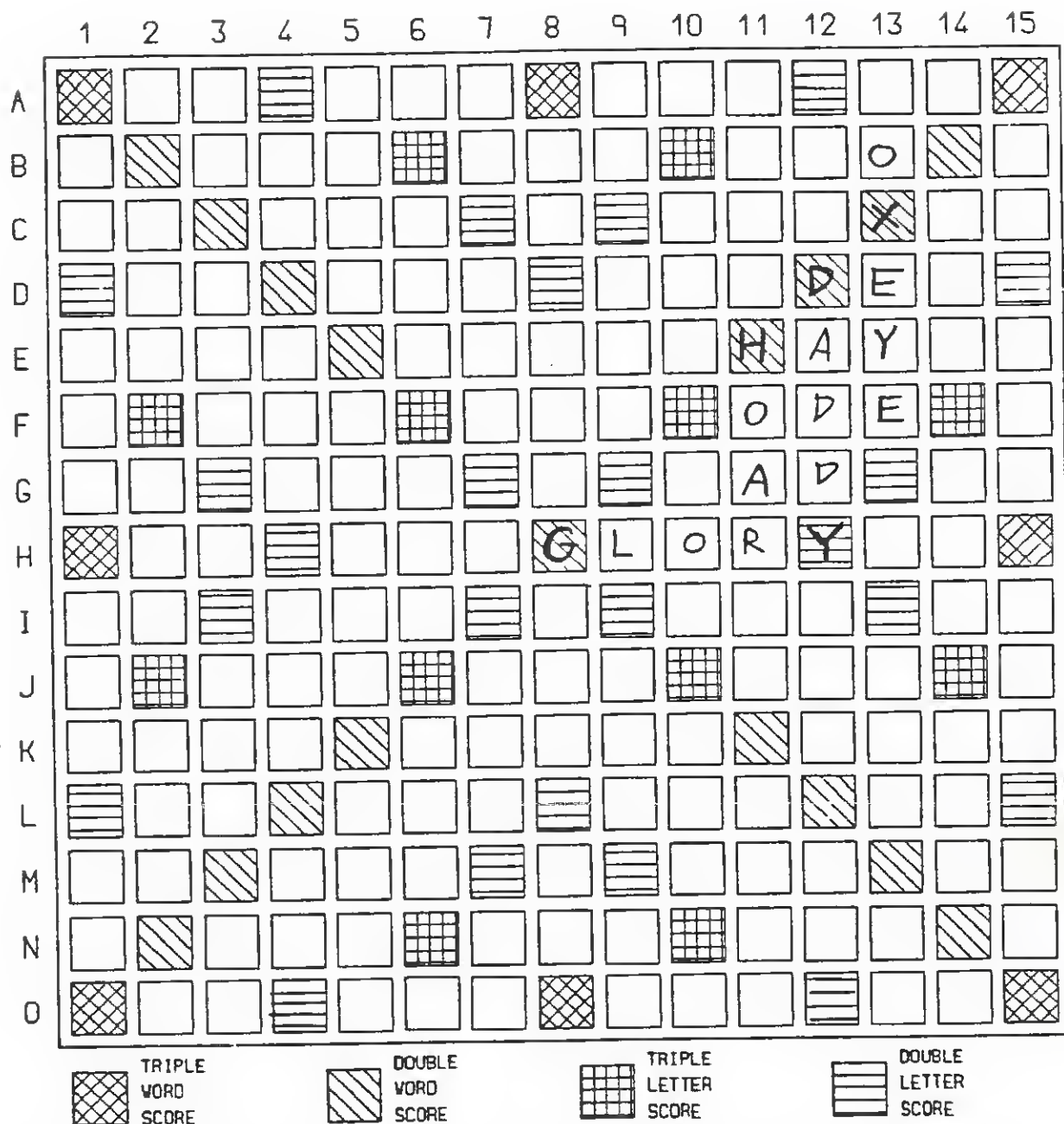
tnr did join in on the second most popular quayle bash, saying it's silly to assume that women will vote for him just because he's pretty. it is silly (though not necessarily incorrect) to say so, and it's also insulting as others have claimed. that's why no one in the bush campaign ever mentioned the idea (though i don't doubt that some thought it). the alleged pretty-face strategy was invented by certain journalists (notably ellen goodman) who don't like bush and are looking for another excuse to attack him. looking through the week's news stories, the worst thing i can find from a republican is AZ sen john mccain's insinulative remark, "i can't believe that a guy that handsome wouldn't be attractive in some respect." jim baker did mention that quayle was expected to poll well among women. this expectation is based on quayle's performance in his 86 senate race in which he did better among women than he did among men, even though his opponent was a woman (though not a "strong candidate" as the bush campaign likes to say). one need not know why he did well among women to predict that he'll do so again. (i think such a prediction is wrong though, because indiana women are so atypical. i suspect that indiana has a much higher percentage of wives and mothers than the nation as a whole.)

SCRABBLE

kevin tighe orders 11c:hop,ode,pay=36, a move also recommended by mike barno. 11e:hair;hay,ade,id=39 was recommended by chuff afflerbach, ed wrobel, and i thought there was someone else but i don't see any more orders in my files. jake halverstadt offered the similar play, 11e:hoar;hay,ode,ad=39. 11e:hoar has the disadvantage of leaving a second I in an already vowel-heavy rack, but 11e:hair has a greater disadvantage: the word "ade" is not listed in the ospd. to those who work those 13x17 computer-generated crosswords in the daily paper, that seems outrageous, but not after you look through a few normal dictionaries and find that they don't list it either (except as a suffix).

with this turn i am invoking for the first time the rule, "if a kibitzer's move is clearly better than the player's move, said kibitzer becomes the new player for the rack." there are three criteria on which to judge a move: what it leaves on the board, what it leaves in the rack, and the score. 11e:hoar does not leave the board any more open than 11c:hop does, it scores three points more, and it leaves a clearly more promising set of letters for next turn (three vowels and a consonant rather than four vowels). note that a play need not be very much better to be clearly better. note also that the relative merits of two plays are more clear when the plays are similar, as these are.

i'm not sure that jake realized that he might end up being a player in this game, but rules is rules, so he is the new player for rack b.



the score is 67-61. IIPU remains on rack b. chuff draws five tiles and rack a now contains AADGGOV. deadline is friday, september 30, 1988.

this turn was delayed because last issue came out prematurely and this one didn't. so that delays need not happen again, i'm changing my definition of the deadline: if i'm ready to do an issue of bz before the scrabble deadline, and the player has his orders in, i will run a turn in the game. that means kibitzers' orders could be too late even if they come before the deadline. if a player requests with his orders that they not be used until the deadline (thus preserving his option to change them later) i will honor the request.

i noticed that the dls's on the top and bottom rows were missing from the board i've been printing. they're on there now. it occurred to me that i never specified how i'd choose which kibitzer takes over a rack if more than one submits the same "clearly better" move. i will give priority to the one (if any) who has been the player for that rack most recently; other than that it's random.

mark berch (7/24): "back in #7 you had some ideas for entrepreneurs. for 'medium,' you suggested a combination of carseat and stroller, asking that someone design and manufacture it. most people are unaware of the fact that there is a huge amount of design work already done, sitting in the patent literature. many such combos have been designed, at least as early as 1974 (u.s. patent #3,829,113) and as recently as june 1988 (#4,750,783). some are all in one piece, and in others, the wheel assembly comes off when you put it back into the car. there are at least a dozen of these around, and for those interested, they are in class 280, subclass 30.

"but more generally, there's a huge amount of patent work done on combining a and b, which never gets manufactured. the idea of combining related a and b looks good, but the value of being able to combine them has to be able to overcome the inferior function that you are likely to get. that's not going to be as good a stroller as a regular one that doesn't have the special folding requirements that such a combo would need to have. one-piece combos tend to have more levers and bars and latches and the like -- things that can bend or get stuck or jam or whatever. take-apart type combos need to have extra screws and need to be lined up and fastened and all the rest. besides, you can just throw the stroller in the truck when you're done. the carseat has to be carefully strapped in each time. i certainly wouldn't want it. i suspect such an item could never be mass-marketed because people don't want to fool with the more complex stroller and more complex carseat.

"tremendous amounts of energy and money have been put into some combinations, such as trying to invent one machine which will wash and dry your clothes, combining a furnace and an air conditioner (most particularly combining heat exchangers) and the like. while some combinations have been successful (refrigerator with freezer on top), most aren't, and there's even a trend the other way -- to components. this happened in audio equipment in the 60s, when the single-unit systems were broken up into parts. it's happened in the 80s with video stuff, where you can buy television screens without the associated tuner (which we have) or even without speakers, which has happened.

"incidentally, one of the most famous of the patent cases arose from an extremely successful and very low tech combo: the guy who got the bright idea of combining the pencil with the eraser. he never got a patent, though. the courts held it was obvious. but it was a sensational commercial success.

"the bentsen choice makes sense when you understand dukakis's pragmatic approach: what can i do to win? bentsen is a good moneyraiser (contrast glenn, who is deep-deep-deep in debt), is regionally well known, and is quite popular in a state with a lot of electoral votes and has at least some foreign policy experience. and he's going to make it a lot harder for bush to paint dukakis as some sort of weirdo liberal who can be expected to revert to the far left as soon as he's given some power. dukakis has tried hard to present himself as a practical man who gets things done, and he accentuates that by making a 'sensible' choice of a man who is known for being able to get things done. this choice has made bush's task significantly more difficult, though of course, bush can do the same with his choice."

me: some wag said that in picking bentsen, dukakis picked a "carbon copy of his opponent." if bush wanted to do the same he could have picked tom kean.

it's nice to know that someone else is interested in the "ideas for entrepreneurs" stuff. lately i've been thinking that the biggest gap in my education is my ignorance of law, particularly business law. law is to the social world what math is to the physical world: it's the rules by which the game is played. it's easy enough to talk in general terms about how the world works or how it ought to work, but you can only go so far before you have to sit down and work out the equations.

but i digress. next time you're looking through patent literature, see what you can find out about electric-powered automobiles. i once heard that practical models have been designed but the rights to produce them are held by the big auto companies which would rather not have them built. i wonder how much of that is true and how much is folk mythology.

mike barno (8/8): "faulty assumption hunting --. you're correct in saying that space exploration is dissimilar to mid-millennium naval exploration/colonization. maybe that's why i didn't state nor imply any such analogy. how is this relevant? sure, off-planet logistics are much harder (a spur to new technology useful in terran under-sea and polar operations); but of course there's no hostile aborigines, at least until we get out of the system. man's pioneering has always taken new forms and led to new capabilities unforeseen at venture's start.

"next misrepresentation: my 'intuitive feeling that time is almost up' -- huh? i said 'eventually.' if new solutions are generated, enabling us to continue for, say, five million years, then life is wiped out without taking root elsewhere, are we not just as extinct as if sagan's worst-case scenario is proven true tonight? there is substance to kemp's quote, but 'fiddle-dee-dee, they'll take care of it tomorrow' gives us no guarantees, particularly when we're having difficulty in getting through today. or are you filing a patent for transmutation of the elements this week?" ((as a matter of fact....))

"the sahara, greenland, antarctica -- very useful some day, good tasks -- if the ecosystem survives. that's the point. several rational scenarios would leave those places just as lifeless as oakland and endwell." ((oakland isn't lifeless.)) "i'd choose to make an effort at establishing life elsewhere, rather than bet everything on achieving perfect waste management, and new energy techniques, and new food production techniques, and new usable materials, and population-control measures so all the foregoing can meet mankind's needs, and meter-direction capabilities, and ways to keep the next hitler or khomeini, not to mention more mainstream governments and factions, from wrecking everything with nukes or supergerm, and a social organization capable of handling all this with equity so wars and revolutions don't tear the system down, and solutions to the new problems that are bound to come along. 'and,' not 'or,' dig? most of mankind is about as rational and cooperative as mr geryk. so i have considerably less faith than hope. oh, sure, it's all worth a try -- out-migration could never even keep up with population-growth, and those who stay behind (99.999%) deserve a fair shot at a good future. which is why you might want to be able to use the nearly unlimited energy and minerals between earth's atmosphere and the asteroid belt.

"cannibalism is a historic fact in every line of the human species. does the hobby hatred and gossip custodian revere that legacy and endorse 'long pig' consumption in present-day seattle?"

me: i suspect not, but mr carrier can speak for himself.

okay, i plead guilty to faulty assumption hunting. i've been noticing lately that there are many people who do have an intuitive feeling that time is almost up. in my eagerness to rebut that idea i mistakenly attributed it to you.

what i said about the analogy of space exploration to mid-millennium naval exploration was, "it sounds like you're hinting at the frequently drawn analogy." the analogy is frequently drawn, and it did sound like you were hinting at it. you said, "the nations and/or factions that get into earth orbit and beyond will be by far the most prosperous and powerful ones long before the end of the next century." i figured that prediction must be based on the 16th century europe analogy because i saw no other plausible basis for it. your prediction assumes not only that within 120 years space investments become extraordinarily profitable, but that these first little steps we are taking now are so relevant to that profit that the nation which takes them will have a significant and lasting advantage in the space race. if space research pays off and, for instance, the russians discover a way to set up a plant on the moon which turns rocks into a form of energy which can be beamed back to earth safely and inexpensively, it is most likely that within a few years mitsubishi, at&t, electrolux and half a dozen other companies we haven't heard of will have their own moonbeam plants. maybe theirs won't be quite as good, but they won't have wasted trillions of dollars setting up for it.

you are correct to "and" together the various problems to be solved on earth, but you are incorrect to imply (by saying "rather than") that establishing life

elsewhere is an alternative to facing those problems. even if it were, i still think the home project is the more practical one for a few more centuries; most of the problems you mention aren't going to destroy the ecosystem anyway. social and economic equity would be nice but the lack of them is hardly planet-threatening. food, energy, and materials technologies are galloping along even as we speak; waste management is sure to be tomorrow's big industry (if you're looking for a lucrative college major, i suggest chemical engineering); and population control, as i've said so many times, is completely unnecessary. the remaining problems, even together, can be addressed more profitably than space colonization.

i think you're wrong to minify even slightly the difference between extinction tonight and extinction five million years from now. what can you possibly want if not finite extensions of the human race's allotted time? even five million years strains my sense of species identity (it takes some effort to care about the lives of beings who will likely bear less resemblance to us than we do to australopithecines), but infinite human existence is a meaningless concept. if nothing else, it assumes that time itself will prove infinite -- a dubious assumption even if there isn't enough matter in the universe to make it contract causing a reversal in entropy thus making time turn back on itself. (but now i'm starting to sound like the one who's been reading too much sci-fi....)

ed wrobel (7/26): "i was so taken with your illustration of political reality that i decided to try my hand at one. since the universe curves back on itself i made mine circular rather than linear. i put you slightly to the right of center based on your votes against bond issues, your apparent opposition to 'affirmative action,' vegetarians and brainless activists, your apologia for ed meese and your sniping at jackson and dukakis. after reviewing this list, though, 'it seems to me that' you should be sitting with dyed-in-wool republicans or thereabouts.

me: your map is delightful; i'm devoting an entire page to it. one of these days i'll make a serious attempt to map the political "spectrum," complete with an opinion survey which yields coordinates (like those career aptitude tests they gave us in high school). i think i can cover everything i want with three indices.

jake halverstadt (july): "slow-moving morning. stayed up late working on my novel, had to get up early to drop sue off at work. this may not be a good letter, but i've owed you for so long --

"we're getting ready to buy a new car, and i'm depressed about the prospect. have had our 1978 amc concord (the snow goose) since 1980, this time we're going after something brand new. don't want to spend a lot, the ford escort and chevy sprint seem to be the front-runners. nothing flashy, but we feel no need to make a fashion statement with our wheels.

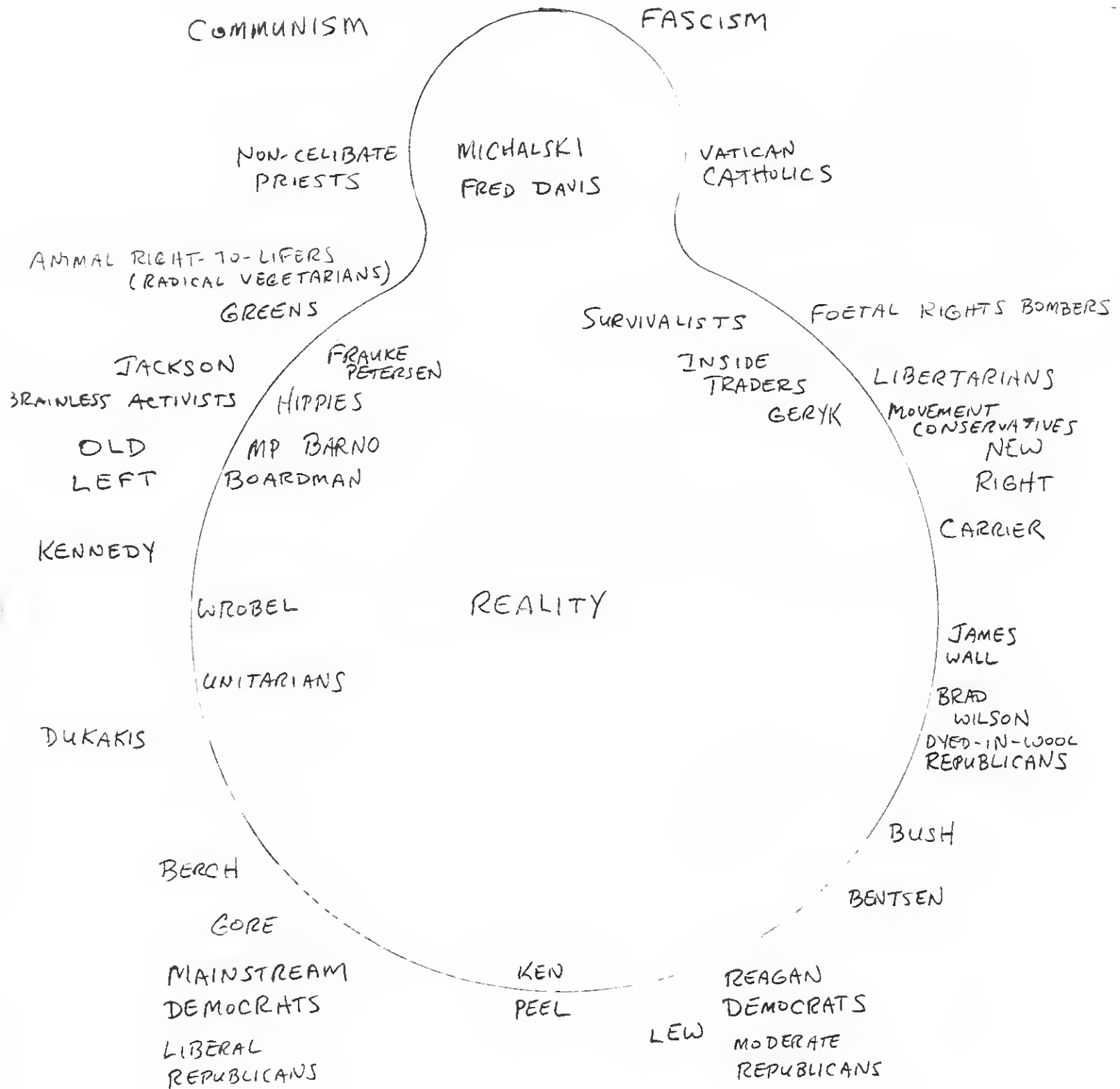
"spent last sunday cruising car lots. colorado law requires car dealers to be closed on sunday, so there were no vultures trying to make a sale. a good law, i say.

"once we get the new car we get to go on vacation. nothing exciting here, either, it's back to ohio to see sue's parents are our grannies. haven't been back to the old home town since 1980 and am in no hurry to get back there. the place has gone to hell, from a nice little village of 3,500 to a yuppie haven of 15,000.

"politics? here we go again. i've always felt a natural kinship with the democrats, and once again they've given me a candidate i can't vote for. nothing new. i saved my 1972 nixon-mcGovern write-in ballot, maybe it will be worth something some day. in 1976 jimmy carter told me he'd never lie to me. that clinched my vote for ford. in 1980 i went for anderson. last time out i wrote in colorado gov richard lamm. this time? bruce babbitt.

"...last time benzene and my new republic showed up on the same day -- quite the double-header."

me: another reluctant democrat, hm? how'd you like tnr's gop convention issue, with marty and mort fretting about how the democratic party has gone astray and trying to explain why they don't just give it up and turn republican like jeane kirkpatrick did? great stuff.



CENTER

david hood (7/22): "you seem to think a lot of dukakis ('i am impressed by the candidate.')" ((actually, that was meant as a reference to mr bentsen, though i've since changed my mind completely. i don't much care for him or for his fellow pro-business pork-barreling bureaucrat, danny quayle.)) "i wonder if you have paused to look at the facts of his massachusetts miracle:

"1) duke's administration boosted state government spending by 65% between 1983 and 1988. massachusetts spending has grown at twice the rate of federal spending growth. a penny-pinching fiscal conservative he is not.

"2) duke has only gone along with tax cuts after citizen groups have forced him out of his spending habits. his 'temporary' tax increases in 1975 were kept in place until 1985, when the citizens for limited taxation raised a groundswell of public outrage that caused duke to back the repeal initiative. he also opposed the proposition 2½, which substantially lowered property taxes." ((as i've stated here before, i'm not at all opposed to higher property taxes.))

"this measure (2½) is widely believed to have spurred the massachusetts economic recovery, which was greatest when duke was out of office.

"3) faced with a \$400 million deficit in 1988, did duke cut out some of his bloated government payroll? nope. he raised, or at least tried to raise, business taxes. not exactly the best way to attract business to massachusetts --

"4) manufacturing productivity has increased greatly during the reagan years, dispelling the myth that american business is falling apart. on the other hand, it may indeed be falling apart in massachusetts, where there has actually been a net decrease in jobs (in a nation with unprecedented employment levels). and businesses are abandoning massachusetts as dukakis concocts various 'social welfare' schemes that strangles the free market's inherent productivity.

"5) duke's recently passed comprehensive health plan costs an employer over \$1,000 per employee yearly. maybe liberals think people are entitled to such benefits, but at what expense? companies will go under -- and it will be the little guys, not big business, who will be hit the hardest. job creation in the nation takes place primarily in small entrepreneurial businesses, which will be destroyed by this health plan.

"now what does all this tell us? dukakis will spend more and more of our hard-earned bucks on silly government programs to promote 'social welfare.' what he doesn't understand is that the best guarantee of social welfare is an unfettered market, which automatically diverts resources to the most efficient uses"((and more important, to the most needy)) "-- which frees up capital to use to buy t-bills, create jobs, or be donated to charities. government 'planning' inevitably fails to achieve such aims."

me: my long-time readers will be surprised to hear that i "think a lot of dukakis" after i so vigorously bad-mouthed him during the primary. as far as i can tell, everything you say about the massachusetts miracle is accurate, so i'll leave that for one of dukakis's defenders to contest.

i do think dukakis is a bit more frugal than you give him credit for. i think his distaste for debt financing is genuine. bush, too, genuinely wants to reduce the budget and its deficit, but his approach would be to confront congress, and he'd lose that confrontation. if dukakis were president, the democratic congress would be under pressure to cooperate with him, and i think that he's insist on some budget discipline. that's why i'm convinced that we'd get more deficit-reduction and budget-reduction out of pres dukakis than we would out of pres bush.

like most republicans, you seem to oppose tax increases because they tend to slow economic growth. i think our economy is sufficiently healthy that a slowdown of its growth is not a major concern; i worry more about the distribution of wealth. consequently, i am opposed (and not unconditionally) to tax increases because they usually result in spending increases, and i am opposed to spending increases because they tend to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. (yes, widen)

your summing up is very astute. the problem with social welfare programs is simply (and solely) that they don't work, and the problem with dukakis is not that he might raise taxes (which isn't such a terrible thing in itself), but that he

genuinely believes in the government's ability to regulate social justice. unfortunately, any economic restriction imposed by the government will, by its very nature, tend to impede the natural tendency of wealth to become more balanced. thus, even those programs which are intended to help or "protect" the poor are unlikely to do so. if we truly want to achieve a better balance of wealth, and i do, the best thing we can do is start abolishing the social welfare state, starting with the blatantly anti-poor programs like urban development grants, import quotas, agricultural subsidies, job training programs (including sen quayle's jtpa), transportation grants, and social security.

chris carrier (7/26): "about animal rights -- obviously, i don't think that it is necessary to emulate the practices of our ancestors in order to honor them -- if we did, we'd still be living in caves. however, i find it impossible to believe that after a million years as an omnivore, some sudden moral leap to vegetarianism is required.

"i frankly feel that veggies are veggies for the same reason that holy roller 'christians' are holy roller 'christians': they want to feel morally superior to the rest of the population. (in fact i regard the fundamentalist sects to be no better than the pharisees of 2,000 years ago.)

"also, animal rights activists have a lot of hatred for, if not themselves, then for their species and their culture. an example of this self-hatred was evident in a letter to the nome nugget, commenting on the iditarod from an animal rights activist in the lower 48: 'so the "sled dog" race has begun in alaska.... you are subjecting 700 dogs to this bizarre parody of sport.... mushers are kindred spirits...with the creatures who pit animals in fights to the death for human amusement.... all of the other animals on earth as well as the earth itself would be much better off if the master race would just leave.'

"the author of this letter, like most animal rights activists, has absolutely no conception of how brutal raw, untamed nature is. case in point: only one sea creature in ten million escapes a violent death at the hands of another sea creature." ((hands?)) "many land-based environments are almost as harsh. even those animals who don't die a violent death usually die slowly and painfully of starvation. compared to life in the sea, the chance of surviving the absolute worst manifestations of humanity -- auschwitz, or the killing fields of cambodia -- was several orders of magnitude higher. in fact, living creatures are designed to feed off other living creatures (whether plant or animal) and in view of this, i think to talk about an inherent 'right to life' for animals is silly.

"about the space program. i'm surprised that a former alaskan would oppose it -- surely you know that in 1867 when we bought alaska it was referred to as "an icebox" and 'seward's folly.' you do have a point, though, that the development of outer space would parallel the development of earth's polar regions more than the european expansion into the americas.

"why would people want to live in space? why do people live in the arctic? largely because there are natural resources there, and because of its military importance. given the fact that the earth is at the bottom of a large gravity well and the resources are at the top, the day will come when extracting space-based resources will be easier than doing it here. a hundred years from now i can see the moon having a population density maybe one-fifth that of the north slope of alaska today -- (the one-fifth being based on the fact that 4/5 of the nsb population is native alaskan while there are no 'natives' on the moon) -- which would work out to about 40,000 people. this of course would be conditional on finding a major mineral strike on the moon, but that shouldn't be too hard with a whole planet to search.

me: the minerals are there all right, but there's no point in mining them as long as they can be mined less expensively down here. there are lots of valuable minerals in alaska, but they're only just beginning to extract them, because it's always been cheaper to import them from more temperate climes (ie, south africa).

to me, the anthropophobia which is evident in animal rights activism and similar philosophies is the most fascinating cultural phenomenon of the times. the doctrine goes something like this: natural things are good; unnatural (ie, man-made) things are bad (the fundamental premise -- it applies to consumer products as well). man was originally a natural being, but somewhere in his history he went astray and now his existence is a force acting against nature. furthermore, owing to our collective identity as a species, to some extent we all share the guilt. however, we can redeem ourselves somewhat by striving to live as close to nature as possible.

and you thought god was dead.

john kelley (7/20): "read with interest your comments on the situation with the upcoming seoul olympics. i differ; the mexico city games spawned (or, more precisely, catalyzed) a great deal of civil disorder. i see the same situation as a serious possibility in the seoul games. korea's only hope is that it is an emerging manufacturer of high-quality technical goods, following japan and taiwan toward success, whereas mexico is and remains a stagnant source of cheap labor for the u.s. economy.

"it sure hasn't taken dukakis long to become nationally known, has it?" ((it took quayle only three days.)) "to me, he's a no-name from new england; until this campaign, i hadn't heard of him, and i don't consider myself isolated from current events. same for bentsen, just happens to be from further south and west. of course, the same was true of bush before the 1980 campaign; being director of central intelligence isn't exactly a high-profile job. i'm sure dukakis will take care of the east, and bentsen will take care of dixie.

"i guess it's pretty hard for me to see the animal-rights point of view (baby seals, monkeys in the lab, and all the other manifestations of this perspective). i always get this feeling that what people are really saying, but will never admit it, is: 'if it's ugly (subjective judgment, granted) like a cow or a pig, it's ok to kill it. if it's a cute little seal pup, or a poor little kitten, or a harmless, darling little rhesus monkey, then forget it.' i'd have a lot more respect for this viewpoint if it were applied consistently as opposed to conveniently."

me: it might make you feel better to know that i hadn't heard of dukakis either until the started mentioning him as a possible candidate in spring last year. i don't follow governors real carefully. at the time i had even a passing familiarity (ie, name recognition) of only about a third of them.

mexico and south korea are about as different culturally as two nations can be, so i think your olympics analogy falls apart there. "only hope" is an odd phrase to use in discussing a country which is effervescing with hope. this generation of south koreans has enjoyed an increase in standard of living which is unprecedented at any time or any place in history.

julie martin (8/18): "i did not deny individual responsibility -- it's right there in my letter, using fixing a ticket as an example of an individual ducking his responsibility for his own action. if you kill yourself eating hot dogs, it is your responsibility but if oscar mayer goes out of its way to propagandize how 'safe' hot dogs are, then it bears some share of the responsibility as well. a better example would be, of course, the cigarette industry.

"i understand your psychobabble ('infantile') -- why can't you understand mine? ('free-floating guilt')

"yes, there's a difference between 'responsibility' and 'culpability' -- so what? how is that relevant to this discussion? i don't see your point."

me: i think i did understand your psychobabble, but i was trying to elicit elaboration.

i can see from your letter and from mr barno's that i need to cut down a bit on my responses to letters. i have a bad habit of using thmm as springboards for my own perorations which may or may not have much to do with the letter at hand. this time i'm willing to let you have the last word on every point but one: no one can be propagandized without his consent. yes?

ed wrobel (8/15): "my observation was not that some conservatives call themselves liberals but that the only people using the word 'liberal' are conservatives -- and they sure don't use it to describe themselves. they hurl it at those who disagree with them, kind of like, well, -- like 'communist.' (reagan said in new orleans on sunday that the demos are 'liberal, liberal, liberal' -- presumably thrice-cursed. this kind of name-calling may have worked against mondale and mc-govern, but it won't this year against duke and tex, two macho guys.)

"do you have a copy of the postal titan rules?" ((no)) "they work okay. one problem is the number of accidental engagements. movement is simultaneous, rather than sequential. the rules allow legions to cross paths but if they end in the same land, or one holds and is bumped, then they engage.

"so your political spectrum illustration was partial, eh? well, i learned about guys like you in statistics class and from mark twain. ('there are lies; there are damned lies; and there are bar graphs that misrepresent data by not using a zero base.')

"face it, mark lew, not only are you a conservative, you are a conservative propagandist! look -- even more anti-duke and anti-jesse snipes --this time on the back page where non-subscribing postal employees will read them!"

((i believe that the posties aren't supposed to be reading bz. i know it's illegal for them to read postcards.))

"but you hit the nail on the libertarian's head when you wrote, 'the simple fact (is) that we all live in the same world and are affected by one another.' one person's exercise of his freedom, in many instances, necessarily limits another's freedom. the colleague at the next desk exercising his right to smoke is intruding on my right to breathe smoke-free air. i'm quite pleased that businessmen are prohibited from refusing to serve me because they dislike my skin tone. i suspect that individuals are not fully responsible for contracting disease, so maybe spreading the cost of their care is more 'moral' than letting them die for lack of money. (although some behaviors increase risk, some very nice people have come down with colds despite precautions, cancer despite avoiding carcinogens and aids from blood transfusions rather than injecting drugs.) and there's a radical, leftish idea for you: some people are poor for reasons other than having 'chosen to squander their own resources.' in fact, it looks to me like those people driving around in audis buying compact discs and nose candy and wearing power ties are the ones squandering resources. and they ain't poor."

((no, they're not. in my response to mr hood i expressed regret that citizens are "required to pay for the financial support of those who have chosen to squander their own resources." if you read it again, you'll notice that i didn't say those squanderers are poor. as you point out, most of them are not poor, but that doesn't stop our government from requiring us to support them. if government redistribution of wealth really did move money from rich to poor, as it is supposed to, i wouldn't object to it as much as i do.

whether a disease is a person's "fault" is not the point, nor is how nice a person is. if life were fair it would end in a seven-way draw.))

"your response to gossage on busing was fascinating. i occasionally think that you split hairs to the point of distinction without a difference. but not here. elsewhere you disdained putting money into the public school system because it has nothing to do with education. wrong. one step toward moving some money out of defense and into schooling might be to not elect politicians who use rhetoric like 'window of vulnerability.' there's an article by your mentor, mclaughlin, in sunday's washington post, asserting that reagan will be remembered as one of the two great presidents of the 20th century, along with fdr. jm gives reagan credit for gorbachev's rise to power. also points out the numerous striking similarities between rwr and fdr. seemed kind of silly to me. i'd be surprised if rwr really had that much influence in the kremlin (more than he has in congress!)

"and speaking of distinctions without differences, it sounds to me like you are indeed asserting that animal rights activists are immature and infantile. if they somehow have not adequately developed a sense of separation of self and environment, similar to an infant before development of this concept, well what do you call that?

why not infantile or immature? some might say that an emphasis on this separation might create such a gulf between the self and the outside than an attitude like 'the earth is my ashtray' is created, manifesting itself in bumperstickers that say, 'how's my driving? dial 1-800-eat-shit,' salespersons who live by 'caveat emptors' and obnoxious writers of letters-to-the-editor.

"as i reread this letter, it's tone seems a bit antagonistic. i don't mean it to be so. i'm not trying to 'make points' on arguments, just being 'lively.'"

me: don't sweat it. it takes a lot more than a mildly antagonistic tone to offend me.

you're wrong. i'm not calling the animal-firsters "infantile." if you want to accuse me of insulting them, i'll admit that i consider them aberrant, insecure, and even emotionally crippled, but i won't call them infantile. if an animal-firster's emotional development had stopped right there in infancy, he could pick up where he left off and be immature but healthy. my argument is that one specific psychological development, which normally takes place during infancy, was somehow thwarted. unfortunately, other growth continued on schedule and now it's too late for the missing part to develop properly. a person so impaired is not "infantile" any more than a legless and armless person whose mother took thalidomide while pregnant, is "fetal."

this is the second letter in which you've invokled the favorite l----- source of funds, "moving some money out of defense and into...." early this year i sat in on a lecture by berkeley poly sci prof aaron wildavsky (american academia's foremost authority on the budgetary process, for whatever that's worth). he said that all the military cuts have already been made and are coming through the pipe. i am suspicious of any claim that budget cuts can't be made, and i suspect mr wildavsky is incorrect on this point, but his statement does make me wonder if "shifting some money from" the military budget isn't much much more easily said than done.

GOSSIP

it was announced last friday that dukakis's political alter-ego john sasso is officially back in the campaign. well. that must be the biggest surprise since james baker took over the bush campaign. mike says, "he made a mistake and he's paid the price." wrong on both counts. if sasso is separated from the campaign for a year, he is not the one who's paying. but for dukakis, the price was worth it, because sasso's maneuver removed the campaign's most threatening rival.

it's not cynicism but respect for the dukakis strategists that leads me to suspect that this entire course of events was anticipated, deemed worthwhile, and planned for. what we forget now (and what i didn't notice at the time) is that the crucial point in dukakis's primary campaign came not in february or march or april, but last fall. dukakis entered the race late; hart, gephardt and babbitt had been running since 1985, and there were organizations which had been trying to recruit gore and biden, but dukakis's entry into the race (like simon's) was a surprise. last summer, his name recognition was the lowest and the political pundits viewed him as a cheap imitation of mario cuomo -- but none of that mattered because he was raising money faster than any of the other candidates. in 1987, dukakis raised \$10 million, more than twice as much as his nearest competitor. that competitor was not gephardt (who ran out of money before super tuesday and lost to dukakis) nor gore (who ran out of money before new york and lost to dukakis) but joe biden. in september, they were much closer: dukakis had \$5 million and biden had \$3 $\frac{1}{2}$ million. but both were unknown to the voters, so their public images were yet to be defined.

when some republicans made passing references to the higher-than-usual incidence of borrowing in biden's oratory, dukakis strategists recognized an opportunity to have biden's image defined in a negative way, and sasso, who excels at such strategy, delivered the right information to the right people so as to unleash the medi inquisition which damaged biden's chances enough so that he decided the campaign was no longer worth the effort.

though lies were told, none were told by sasso. nothing sasso had done was illegal, nor was it even particularly sleazy. but cautious michael was mindful of the power of the beast they had unleashed, and he realized that if the public came to perceive him as a dirty campaigner it wouldn't much matter that sasso actually

hadn't done anything wrong. so it was decided that the best course was to let sasso go, and make do with a less savvy campaign manager for a year and put up with the short wave of bad press which would accompany sasso's rehiring after the convention.

perhaps my biggest disappointment in al gore was his support of an increased minimum wage. now i hear, to my amazement, that even george bush has called for a minimum wage increase. how can these people be so short-sighted? labor is a commodity; minimum wage is price-fixing. if members of congress decided that hamburger deserves to command a higher price, would they pass a law requiring butchers to charge as much for hamburger as they do for steak? if they did, people wouldn't pay more for hamburger; either they'd start buying steak instead, or they'd stop buying beef altogether. in either case the hamburger would just go to waste -- as will low-income workers if the minimum wage is allowed to go too high.

paul simon says we need a minimum wage to "protect workers." protect them from what? from poverty? minimum wage does not create wealth, nor does it require that any existing wealth be redistributed to workers. from subjection? minimum wage makes workers less free, not more free. it doesn't offer anybody any more opportunity. all it does is deny workers the right to work for less. this right is crucial to the ability of the underprivileged to compete.

during the democratic presidential primary, richard gephardt and others deplored the "bicoastal economy" -- the phenomenon whereby businesses abandoned middle america and moved to the more prosperous coastal states, destroying the economies of families and communities in the heartland. the businesses aren't moving arbitrarily or on a whim, they move because they can operate more efficiently in the new location. in order to stay employed, some workers will also have to move. but suppose a family from alabama doesn't want to move to new hampshire. normally, it would have the recourse of working for less, and if enough families did the same, they could make it worthwhile for the emigrating businesses to stay. similarly, if two people are applying for a job and one is slightly more qualified but the other is poverty-stricken and desperately needs the job, the employer will be motivated to hire the former unless the latter, who values the money more, is allowed to outbid him. if an employer has a number of applicants equally qualified for a job, he is likely to choose based on his personal prejudices. the law might prevent him from engaging in such obvious discrimination as racism or sexism, but perhaps he dislikes overweight people, or people with bad skin. if the candidates are allowed to compete with each other by lowering the price of their labor, the employer can still discriminate, but (unless his favorite happens to be the one offering the lowest price) he'll have to pay for his prejudice. these examples merely illustrate what ought to be obvious: that infringing on workers' right to contract will lessen their ability to get the jobs they deserve.

some progressives are stuck on the idea that labor and business are enemies, even though it's perfectly clear that neither could survive without the other. it stands to reason that what's good for business is generally good for labor and vice versa. why is that so hard to accept?

CHEAP SHOTS

i see that congress is now requiring the pledge of allegiance to be recited on the house floor twice a week. i'm getting really tired of all this sanctimonious pledge of allegiance horseshit. what is so righteous about this ridiculous ritual recitation? this is an innuendo issue. no one has actually said anything substantial except during that little quibble over whether an executive ought to sign laws that might be unconstitutional. but the republicans aren't working this issue because of their interest in legal procedure. of course they don't mean to imply that dukakis is not patriotic, they say, only that he doesn't have the right values or principles or some such. they can dress it up however they want, but until someone can give me one example of how any of this is relevant to how dukakis would perform as president, it's just a bunch of name-calling to me.

the other phony issue is the flap about the massachusetts felon who raped or murdered someone while on parole. to hear the republicans go on about it, you'd

think that dukakis personally hired the guy as a hit-man. of course this is an unhappy incidence, but it's not the least bit relevant to the presidential campaign. they say the governor is ultimately responsible for anything that happens in the state. sure he is, in the sense that you can blame him for anything, but that doesn't mean one can reasonably expect any governor to prevent such things. california had a similar parole program when reagan was governor, and no doubt a few parolees did bad things then. should we blame gov reagan for them? for that matter there are hundreds of various sorts of federal safety inspectors all over the country. should we blame the president every time a bridge collapses or a building burns down? in the real world, bad things do happen occasionally. to imply that the government ought to be able to prevent that is no better than to subscribe to the ultra-progressive paternalistic view of government which republicans so rightly ridicule.

ed wrobel berates me for apologizing for the right and sniping at the left. i just finished defending dukakis so i may as well continue with a few shots at bush. best line of the week is from john mclaughlin (who is not my "mentor"): "it's no wonder the japanese attacked -- george had been shooting down zeroes for three months." best joke: why didn't bush want to have the presidential debate on sept 25? he thought it would interfere with his christmas plans.

CULTURE

for the last four years the super bowl winner has been the previous year's nfc semifinalist. for that trend to continue, the vikings will have to win it this year. doesn't sound too implausible. so far, i haven't had a chance to pay attention to football this season. i did manage to catch one game last weekend and i saw the scores for the morning games. other than that all i've seen is the last five minutes of this evening's (mon) cowboys-cardinals game a few hours ago. (by the way, isn't it about time they rearranged the divisions in the nfc? i say move phoenix and dallas to the west and new orleans and atlanta to the east. better yet, put new orleans in central and put tampa bay in east.) i had some predictions to make but doug phoned me last night and informed me that all the teams i had picked are now losing. oops. besides, jim burgess insists that football predictions are boring and none of my other subbers have indicated any disagreement.

i heard that my favorite tv show, thirtysomething, won a few emmys. i was surprised. i guess i don't expect the judges to have the same taste as me. particularly well deserved was the best supporting actress award for the woman who plays elliot's wife nancy (lovingly referred to as "what's-her-name" by ed w).

i sort of wanted to have an even number of pages this time, but in counting the pages i have already it just occurred to me that i'm probably over the one ounce and i'll have to pay extra postage. and that thought so depresses me that i don't feel like typing anymore.



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